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ADDRESS
OF THE
PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED STATES

ON THE
ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE BIRTH OF
GENERAL ULYSSES S. GRANT

AT

Point Pleasant, Ohio
April 27, 1922



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ADDRESS.

MY COUNTRYMEN: The military hero of the Republic; a commanding figure in the military history of the world; the surpassing exemplar of magnanimity of all times; the most striking example of the possibilities in American life; the confident and relentless commander in war; and the modest and sympathetic petitioner for peace after victory!

All of these may be said, most befittingly, of the great American whose hundredth birthday anniversary we are met to commemorate, to whose undying fame we add fresh tribute of memory to-day.

In that inevitable contemplation incident to the preparation of an address for this occasion, I have pondered again and again, what distinction, or what attribute, or better, what attribute and achievement, of Gen. Ulysses S. Grant appeals to me most. He looms majestic in the blend of them all—his fame is secure.

One must revere his military genius, even though its development was one of those miracles of grim war itself. No one would have picked him in youth or early manhood, or in his early career as a regular officer, for the great commander. Responsibility and necessity set ablaze the latent genius. Donelson was a flash of daring, Vicksburg his trophy of courage and unalterable determination, Petersburg the revelation of his genius. But at Appomattox he was Grant the Magnanimous, who spoke for reunion as he had fought for union, and turned from grim warrior to the ambassador of peace. He could neither hate nor humiliate, and in the very glow of surpassing triumph he could not be ungracious or inconsiderate.

In that supreme moment of victory, with union saved at unutterable cost, he seems to have surveyed the many disappointments, the measureless sacrifices and the indescribable sorrows. He felt the assurance of the Nation preserved, and yet the one sweeping utterance from his great heart was "Let us have peace."

Undoubtedly the task of reconstruction was lightened because of Grant's moderation. At the height of the struggle he would accept the capitulation of Fort Donelson only on conditions of "unconditional surrender;" but when the fighting was over, he changed from severity to moderation and generosity. In the conclusion of his report to the Secretary of War some months after Appomattox, he

first paid his tribute to the valor of the armies he had commanded, and then concluded with this sentence:

Let them hope for perpetual peace and harmony with that enemy, whose manhood, however mistaken the cause, drew forth such herculean deeds of valor.

I can not but feel that there is for us a lesson in the concluding sentences of the note in which he proposed to receive the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. Those sentences read:

The armies, artillery, and public property to be parked and stacked, and turned over to the officer appointed by me to receive them. This will not embrace the side arms of the officers, nor their private horses or baggage. This done, each officer and man will be allowed to return to their homes, not to be disturbed by United States authority so long as they observe their paroles and the laws in force where they may reside.

To that he added the verbal agreement with General Lee that every man of the Confederate Army who claimed to own a horse or mule, should be permitted to take the animal home. General Lee observed that these conditions would have a happy effect upon his army. Within a few hours after the capitulation had been signed, largely by reason of the generosity of its terms, the men of the two armies were freely fraternizing, and the captured supply trains of the Confederates had been placed again at their disposal, in order that the half-famished soldiers might be properly fed. Describing this incident in his memoir, General Grant wrote:

I said (in talking with General Lee) I took it that most of the men in the ranks were small farmers. The whole country had been so raided by the two armies that it was doubtful whether they would be able to put in a crop to carry themselves and their families throughout the next winter without the aid of the horses they were then riding. The United States did not want them, and I would, therefore, instruct the officers that I left behind, to receive the paroles of his troops, to let every man of the Confederate Army who claimed to own a horse or mule take the animal to his home. Lee remarked again that this would have a happy effect.

In making such conditions, in thus recognizing the vast difficulties of consolidating the peace won through years of suffering and privation, there spoke the great, true heart of the man who could see into the future and realize its problems.

Many years later, when his life was ebbing, and he struggled to the end of his memoirs, all the American people knew of his brave fight, and the inevitable outcome, and the man of magnanimity found himself the recipient of a genuinely nation-wide sympathy. His acknowledgment in the closing paragraph of his exceptional book reveals the soul of a great life. Concerning these kindly expressions he wrote, at the very conclusion of his memoirs:

I am not egotist enough to suppose all this significance should be given because I was the object of it. But the war between the States was a very bloody

and a very costly war. One side or the other had to yield principles they deemed dearer than life before it could be brought to an end. I commanded the whole of the mighty host engaged on the victorious side. I was, no matter whether deservedly so or not, a representative of that side of the controversy. It is a significant and gratifying fact that Confederates should have joined heartily in this spontaneous move. I hope the good feeling inaugurated may continue to the end.

He saw union follow dis-union, but it was not his to live to see complete concord where discord had flourished. I wish he somehow might know that in the more than a third of a century since his one and only surrender, the indissoluble ties of union have been more firmly riveted, and in the shared burdens and triumphs of American progress we have indeed continued at peace at home. Geographical sectionalism is only a memory now, and Mason and Dixon's line remains only a historical record, where an ambiguity in the Federal Constitution was wiped out, and the Nation resumed the onward march on its destined way.

Seemingly, it was a long time in which to reestablish a concord so manifestly essential to the Nation's greater achievements, but the understanding of the magnificent Lee was not universal throughout the South, the magnanimity of Grant was not manifest throughout the North. Wounds had to be healed, and partisan politics temporarily profited more in irritation than in healing. But the war with Spain consecrated North and South to a common cause, and the sacrifice and nation-wide service in the World War revealed the common American soul. Grant, the great nationalist, who appraised union and nationality above all the frightful cost and suffering, would rejoice to acclaim the Republic of to-day.

I do not mean to say that everywhere in our land we are all in complete accord about fundamentals of government or the basic principles upon which society is founded. But the sectionalism of Grant's and Lee's time has been effaced, and the geographical divisions which hindered the formation of the Union, and later threatened its disruption, have given way to the far less menacing divisions which have challenged all civilization, and which make the ferment out of which all progress comes. We are to-day incontestably one people, with a common purpose, universal pride, nation-wide confidence, and one flag. The contentions which beset us are not ours alone, they are the irritants to civilization throughout the world. They are not to be ignored, but they have never halted the human procession, and will not hinder the progress of this firmly founded Republic.

Grant was himself the supreme example of American opportunity. Standing before his humble birthplace, amid the surroundings of his obscure boyhood life, one doubts if three-quarters of a century ago

anyone should have sought here for the military chieftain of a century. We have not a few, even to-day, who think small-town vision to be pitifully circumscribed. And yet this little Clermont County furnished in Ulysses S. Grant and Henry C. Corbin two of the thirteen lieutenant generals who have been commissioned in all our history.

Grant had even less of likelihood to eminence than his unpromising and unprophetic beginning. There was the suggestion of mediocrity in his development, and even the steadfastness of his early manhood was stamped with failure. But there was the inheritance of quality, and he dwelt and grew rugged in the freedom of democracy.

Even the beckoning opportunity of war left him seemingly unfavored by fate. Politically he was out of accord with the Master Martyr who became his commander in chief. But he believed in Union and the Nation supreme. He brought to the armed service preparedness to command, sturdiness of purpose, patience and forbearance, great generosity of soul, and a confidence never to be shaken. The seizure of opportunity, more to serve than to achieve, made him victor, and the quiet man, garbed in failure at Galena, marched to the surpassing heights of military glory. All conquering in command and magnanimous in his triumph, the world saw the soldier and the man, the soldier adored and the man beloved.

Other military leaders hitherto had mounted to lofty heights in the annals of human history. It is useless to compare, but it is befitting to recall that General Grant was not making conquest of territory or expanding empire. He was only seeking to preserve. He did not fight to enslave; he only battled to sustain Lincoln, whom God inspired to bestow freedom. He did not seek to punish or destroy; he was fighting to save and reunite. In his heart were no drastic terms of surrender; he craved the blessings of peace restored.

The other day I received a letter from an old gentleman now living at Annapolis, Maryland, Mr. James W. Owens, who at the age of eighty-two is still practicing law in Maryland's capital city. He related an incident in his own career that was so characteristic of General Grant that it was worth repeating. He told me that he was a soldier in General Lee's army, surrendered at Appomattox, and returned to his home in Maryland. There he was confronted with an order of the Union general commanding the Department of Maryland, which required that all paroled Confederates should take the oath of allegiance. Mr. Owens in his letter to me explained:

As Dick Taylor and Kirby Smith were still fighting, I declined and was put in prison, and released on condition that I would leave the State. I went with an exiled comrade to see General Grant. We left a note, explaining our banishment, and he immediately issued an order saying that in accepting the surrender

of General Lee he had made it a condition that the paroled men should return to their homes, and there remain as long as they observed the conditions imposed. Not designating a loyal or disloyal State, General Grant directed that the general in command in Maryland should rescind his order. I accordingly returned here, and here I am yet, at the age of eighty-two. We veterans of the Confederacy have only a feeling of good will for his memory.

I wonder sometimes if the magnanimity of Grant, the dogged, persistent, unalterable Grant in warfare—the Unconditional Surrender Grant—would not be helpful in the world to-day. The great world struggle, which we might reasonably designate the Civil War of western civilization, and in which we so creditably and helpfully participated, left peoples and nations prostrate, hardly knowing which way to turn for restoration. I can not help but believe that something of the spirit with which Grant welcomed victory, something of his eagerness to return to peaceful ways, would have speeded the restoration and hastened the return to prosperity and happiness, without which there can be no abiding peace. He perpetuated no resentments of war. Perhaps he felt his own wounds which came of calumny, recalled how he was humiliated through misunderstanding, and menaced by jealousy and hampered by politics. But he clung to his vision of union restored, and believed the shortest route to peace to be the surest way of lasting triumph.

Many an incident of the war, many a revelation of his sturdy character showed that his face was set on the one supreme achievement—union and the preserved ark of the American covenant of liberty. No hurting heart, no rivalry, no triumph of other commanders, no promotion of the aspiring or deserving, could remove his gaze from the great end sought. He wrote Sherman, in Grant-like simplicity and sincerity, that he would serve under him as willingly as over him, to attain preserved union. Out of such consecration, out of such unchanging devotion, came his signal victory.

It is not hard to understand effective endeavor and inspiring leadership where men are consecrated to service. He was not concerned about his individual fortunes, he was battling for the Union. He was not seeking self-promotion, he was fighting for the Nation. Rivals sought his removal and disgrace, but he kept on fighting. Lincoln repulsed his enemies. "I can't spare this man; he fights," was all Lincoln would say. He fought for a preserved Union and restored Nation, and succeeding generations are richer because of his example. One may guarantee the security of this Republic so long as leaders among men put the country's good above personal and political advantage.

It is not to be said of Grant that he sought to preserve a political or social order, or even a government, which had especially favored

him. He was too little favored by the existing order. Nor can it be said that he sought personal or political popularity. These things were apart from his early life.

It is conceivable that men are prejudiced in their attitude toward great problems by their own experiences—more by their disappointments than their successes. Grant's own experience in life might have led a less deliberate character to welcome an upheaval, or disunion, or any reversal to the government. But this silent man did not appraise his country by the scale of his own misfortunes.

He had seen much of the Republic. In boyhood he drove often to Cincinnati and saw the developing city, much as he saw St. Louis later on, in his early married life. Between these two periods of observation he had graduated from West Point, he had served creditably in the Mexican War, and was stationed as a military officer on the Pacific coast.

He saw the westward course of the star of empire. He saw two typical American cities grow under the impulse of immigration and an expanding Republic. He saw the foreigner come to breathe deeply in the atmosphere of American freedom and stand erect amid the inspirations of American citizenship. He saw the schooling children, rollicking in the laughter of youth and freedom and equality, garbed in essentially the same raiment, no matter whence they came, and walking in the light of the same opportunity. He saw the dreams of the founding fathers more than made true. He cherished the inheritance which came of their heroism, and he chose to hand that inheritance on to his children and his children's children.

There must have come some such appraisal to this ordinary American boy when grown to manhood. He had yearned for no star, dreamed of no destiny. He merely went the normal way, face ever forward, ready to quicken his step when opportunity called or responsibility summoned. Like most men who have left their names conspicuous on the rolls of public service, responsibility brought forth the greatness of his heart and mind and soul.

He no more resented criticism than he courted applause. He made no outcry against failure, he trusted his own convictions and clung to them with a calm fidelity which challenged every crisis. His modesty was as notable as his serenity was reassuring. Surely in such a breast there was an appraisal of his country, which made consciousness of service the compensation for every denial, and a healing salve to every hurt.

We know he wished the Republic to go on. His 20 years of public and private life, following the war, give proof enough. Though he proclaimed the doctrine of moral disarmament at Appomattox, he believed in a nation equipped for righteous defense. But no aggression was in his breast.

We know his cherishment of peace, intensified by his intimate knowledge of the horrors of war. I can well believe he would have approved all that the Republic has so recently done in joining other nations in lifting the burdens of armament and promoting understandings which make war less likely. I know he would have approved, because we surrendered no independence, we gave up none of nationality for which he fought, but we have furthered the assurances of peace, which was the supreme yearning of his great, brave heart.

It is fifty-seven years since Grant garlanded victory with unanimity. It is thirty-seven years since he laid down the wearied autobiographer's pen and made his one and only surrender. His fame is secure. The Republic has not forgotten and will not forget.

What of the Republic itself? It will not be rashly to say that American example and American conception of justice and liberty since then have influenced the world little less significantly than Grant's service to the Union shaped the course of our own land.

A score of new Republics have unfurled their flags, and democracy has opened new avenues of liberty and made justice more secure. Civilization meanwhile has made such advances that there has seemed a divinity pointing the way. And yet that very civilization, more advancing than entrenched, was threatened by the World War, and in war's aftermath established order has been assaulted and revolution has threatened throughout the world. In our own land the enemies within have been more threatening than those without. Greed and anarchy have menaced. But a calm survey gives every reassurance. Twenty centuries of modern civilization could not have been builded on foundations which are false. A century and a half of gratifying American achievement dates from the sacrifices of the founding fathers, and their firm structure was preserved by the patriots whom Grant commanded, and will be held secure by the patriotic citizenship of the Republic to-day and the grateful Americans of the morrow.



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